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**Onscreen user documentation**

1. What is the nature of onscreen user documentation?

Onscreen user documentation is information to provide guidance to users, and is designed to be viewed on the screen of a computer or other electronic device. Onscreen user documentation explains how to use a product or how to perform a procedure with the product. Its structure and layout should be clear and logical so that a user can easily follow the instructions.

1. List the 3 functions of onscreen user documentation?

* A user may refer to onscreen user documentation for instructions on accessing and using features of new programs or devices, or for instructions on using product features with which they are unfamiliar.
* A user in a workplace may refer to in-house onscreen user documentation for information on company procedures and policies for their information system.
* If a problem occurs while using a product, the user may refer to a help file or an onscreen instruction manual to find a solution.

**Types of onscreen user documentation:**

1. User guides and instruction manuals
   1. What are the purpose of these guides?

The purpose of these guides is to inform and instruct the user about the characteristics, capabilities and functions of the hardware or software. They will detail how to start using the product, and how to perform typical actions with the product.

* 1. What are the two popular formats for onscreen user guides? Why?

Portable document format (PDF) and hypertext (browser-based). Both of these formats support text and graphics, but can be conveniently small in file size. Both formats can be accessed on various platforms or operating systems.

* 1. What is a third party user guide?

A third party company means a different organisation from the original manufacturer of a product. The ‘third party’ may provide support or add-ons for a product, which they then sell for profit.

Describe the characteristics of the following types of onscreen user documentation.

1. Quick start guides

Provided with an application or device for first-time or inexperienced users of the product. They give brief, simple instructions on how to begin using the product, advice on sage usage, and how to perform common tasks such as opening a new file, accessing help files, saving files, printing and exiting an application.

1. In-house user documentation

These user guides and instruction manuals enable the employees or clients of the organisation to use an information system. They may include in-house protocols for the particular organisation, such as access or security procedures, file-naming and file-storing protocols, email protocols and troubleshooting procedures.

1. Read me files

Read me files are provided by the manufacturer with hardware and software products. They contain important information for users, such as system requirements, configuration settings for the product, troubleshooting strategies, web support addresses, and details on how to access product updates.

1. Tutorials

A tutorial consists of step-by-step instructions for using the features and functions of a software program or hardware device. Tutorials may include text and graphics such as screen shots in a PDF or hypertext format, or they may be presented via a series of multimedia files that include video and sound.

1. Help files

help files provide searchable information about the features and functions of a software application or a device. Help files can be extensive. They may provide an overview of various topics, as well as more detailed examples and tutorials.

1. Web support

Web support will have sections such as frequently asked quests (FAQs), knowledge base (a database of information topics about the product), troubleshooting and how to upgrade the product. Web support may also include a ‘tech talk’ section, with solutions or patches for known software bugs that have emerged since the product was released, and other information to support users and technicians working with the product.

1. Tool tips & hint boxes

Tool tips and hint boxes are also forms of onscreen user documentation, as they provide content-sensitive help to support the user in understanding and using a software product

Tool tips: within a software application, holding the cursor over an icon may highlight a text box with the name or function of the icon

Hint box: within a software application, clicking on an icon may open a hint box with a short description of the function of the icon and possibly a related graphic. Hint boxes are a form of content-sensitive help. The hint box feature can usually be turned off by experienced users of the software who do not require hints.